

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
#279**

**JACK LEAMING  
USS *ENTERPRISE*, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON  
DECEMBER 8, 1998  
BY JEFF PAPPAS**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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**Jack Leaming (JL):** ...or something like that. You know, any threatening, any threat. So we didn't discover anything. At the end of 150 miles, we turned for Barbers Point. Those in the northern sector were north of Kauai and east of Kauai. So when they came down towards Barbers Point, which was their, you know, intersection point, they encountered the rendezvous point of the first Japanese wave.

**Jeff Pappas (JP):** Mm-hm.

JL: They shot one guy down.

(Conversation off-mike)

JP: Okay, we're going to start now.

JL: Okay.

JP: An official start.

(Conversation off-mike)

JP: The following oral history interview was conducted by Jeff Pappas for the National Park Service, USS *Arizona* Memorial, at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 8, 1998 at two p.m. The person being interviewed is Mr. Jack Leaming, who was aboard the USS *Enterprise* on December 7, 1941. Actually, there should be a correction. You were actually piloting a plane...

JL: No, I was a radio gunner.

JP: A radio gunner.

JL: We had taken off from the *Enterprise*, okay. Search planes. And our mission was to search 150 miles to ensure that the *Enterprise* could safely arrive at Oahu.

JP: Before we start, Jack, for the record, would you please state your full name for us, your place and date of birth?

JL: Right now?

JP: Yeah.

JL: My name is Jack Leaming. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1919. I'm seventy-nine years old.

JP: What's your birthdate, your full birthdate?

JL: My birthday is December 6, 1919.

JP: Born December 6. So you grew up in Philadelphia, Jack.

JL: Did I what?

JP: Did you grow up in Philadelphia?

JL: No, I grew up in Wildwood, New Jersey.

JP: Okay. In Wildwood, New Jersey, off the coast.

JL: Off the coast.

JP: So you were born in Philly, but your family, was your family living in Philadelphia at the time?

JL: No, my mother moved to Wildwood when I was three months old. And she married a plumber that lived in Wildwood.

JP: Very good.

JL: Okay.

JP: So who's your father?

JL: Don't ask me that question. I don't know.

JP: Okay. So you moved with your mother when you were no more than a little child...

JL: That's right.

JP: ...down to Wildwood, New Jersey, which is the southern shore of New Jersey.

JL: Right.

JP: South of Atlantic City.

JL: Right.

JP: And your mother married there.

JL: Right.

JP: And she married who? Tell me about your...

JL: She married Harry M. Leaming, a plumber in Wildwood, New Jersey. And I was adopted but I don't know when. Anyhow, I carry, you know, his family name.

JP: You were adopted by him?

JL: Yes.

JP: Okay. And so what did your—your mother was basically, she was a homemaker?

JL: Right.

JP: Did she have any more children? Any siblings?

JL: She had five more children by him.

JP: Did you grow up in New Jersey or did the family move from there?

JL: No, I grew up in New Jersey. I had four sisters and a brother. I graduated from Wildwood High School in 1937 as an honor student. And enlisted in the navy on the eighth of December 1938.

JP: Well, tell me about Wildwood back in the 1930's, during the depression.

JL: It was rough. (Chuckles) It was a summer resort, so in the summertime, why, there was adequate work, but during the winter months it was kind of slow. Not much employment. My stepfather worked on the WPA, for about, you know, four or five months a year. And the rest of the time he was a plumber.

JP: Tell me what the WPA is.

JL: The Works Progress Administration set up by [*President Franklin*] Roosevelt.

JP: It was part of, of course, his New Deal.

JL: Yeah, part of the New Deal. And my junior and senior year in high school, I worked for the NYA, which was the National Youth Association.

JP: And do you know who was...

JL: I think it was twenty cents an hour helping the teachers out and helping around school, clean it up.

JP: And that was also a New Deal program.

JL: That was a New Deal program.

JP: Okay. Tell me about Wildwood High School back in the 1930's.

JL: Hm?

JP: Tell me about your high school, about the size of your high school and perhaps some of the activities you had been involved in, in high school.

JL: I wasn't an athlete. I was in...mostly working. I was interested in model airplanes. I wanted to be an aviator.

JP: You wanted to be an aviator?

JL: Yeah.

JP: When did you come to that conclusion?

JL: When [*Charles*] Lindbergh flew over the ocean. (Chuckles)

JP: Interesting, yeah, really?

JL: Yeah.

JP: Lindbergh had been your inspiration?

JL: He was my inspiration. He always has been ever since. I think he was an ace. He was very accomplished, a good navigator. He knew the theory of flight, what affected flight, about weather.

JP: What was most striking about Mr. Lindbergh when you were growing up though, as a child?

JL: It was the fame he received that he didn't ask for. He was, I think, more famous than a movie star, or comparable. And he didn't let fame, you know, deter him from...

JP: Do you remember? Do you remember his trans-Atlantic flight?

JL: Yes.

(Conversation off-mike)

(Taping stops, then resumes)

JP: Jack, we're back with Jack Leaming. Jack, we're talking about Charles Lindbergh, the fact that you had been turned on to aviation by Mr. Lindbergh's flight, trans-Atlantic flight, 1927. Did your—tell me a little bit more about that, about your interest in aviation.

JL: Oh, my preoccupation with aviation was also spurred by Roscoe Turner. He used to carry a lion around with him. And another—I can't remember his name now, another racer. The Cleveland Air Races was very popular in those days. He had a GB Racer. Who was it that flew to Tokyo off the [*USS*] *Hornet*?

JP: That was Doolittle.

JL: Yeah, Jimmy Doolittle. He was another one that made me interested in aviation.

JP: Had you heard about Mr. Doolittle prior to the war?

JL: Yes.

JP: What was he involved in?

JL: Oh, he flew a GB Racer, which was a real unstable airplane and it required a lot of talent to fly it. Numerous fellows who had flown it crashed and killed themselves. But he set a speed record with it. There's a replica of it made now that is used in air races. And it's a tricky aircraft.

JP: Interesting. So basically, then, you finished high school.

JL: I finished high school.

JP: That was in nineteen thirty...

JL: Nineteen thirty-seven.

JP: You graduated with honors.

JL: June 1937.

JP: You graduated with honors from Wildwood High School.

JL: Right.

JP: And at that time, you had already been thinking about a career as an aviator. A career or just a stint in the navy?

JL: No, I wanted a career as an aviator. I had a—I won a scholarship to Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania but it was a pre-med and law school so...

JP: What was the name of the school?

JL: Ursinus, U-R-S-I-N-U-S. But I wanted civil engineering, so I turned it down. Aside from the fact that I didn't have enough money to go, it was only a partial scholarship. So I



finished working that summer on the boardwalk and then I stayed with an uncle in Norfolk, Virginia and he had put two cruises in the navy. And I tried to get a job there and I couldn't get a job, so he recommended that I join the navy and become a radioman. So that's what I chose to do.

JP: That must have been disappointing, though.

JL: Well, it was disappointing but it turned out to where it wasn't so disappointing. When I completed training, I was sent aboard the USS *Enterprise* as a mess cook and I put the *Enterprise* in commission and I was overjoyed to get on an aircraft carrier, 'cause I was going to be in aviation.

JP: Though you weren't being trained as a pilot at that time.

JL: No, I wasn't being trained as a pilot. And I couldn't go to Pensacola because at that time they required a college education.

JP: Now what was Pensacola?

JL: Naval air training. Naval Training Center.

JP: And they required a college degree?

JL: They wanted a college degree.

JP: Navy aviators needed to have a college degree...

JL: Right.

JP: ...in order to go for training. Okay.

JL: And then I found out—after I had been in communications division for about a year and a half, they needed radiomen

for the squadrons. So a group of us volunteered and some of us went to Bombing Squadron Six and three of us went to...

JP: Which was where at that time?

JL: Aboard the *Enterprise*.

JP: Okay.

JL: And three of us were assigned to Scouting Six.

JP: Now tell me, before we go on with that, tell me a little about the *Enterprise* itself. It must have been very impressive...

JL: About what?

JP: About the *Enterprise*, that must have been an impressive ship.

JL: Well, it was. It was the largest carrier at the time. The *Yorktown* and the *Enterprise* were the newest carriers to join the fleet. And in the late thirties, '37, I think the *Yorktown* was commissioned in '37. And we were commissioned in '38. We went on a shakedown cruise [to] Rio de Janeiro, participated in fleet maneuvers and war games in the Caribbean. The *Enterprise* came away with several honors for dive-bombing and for...

JP: Tell me about the physical dimensions of the *Enterprise*...

JL: The *Enterprise*...

JP: ...what struck you most about the ship itself?

JL: The *Enterprise* was 20,000 tons. She's 828 feet long at flight deck level, ninety-six foot beam. Her top speed was thirty-two knots, I believe.

JP: Had you ever seen anything quite like that before?

JL: I hadn't seen anything like that before. And the fact that it was an aircraft carrier and aircraft carriers were new to naval warfare, and this was the top of the line, you know, technology. So to be at the height of, you know, of naval warfare, was quite an honor.

JP: Now you're close to planes.

JL: And I what?

JP: You were close to the airplanes. You'd gotten to see what they're carrying.

JL: Right, right.

JP: What did the *Enterprise* carry at that time, as far as naval aircraft?

JL: The aircraft we had were—we had two aircraft that were biplanes and two squadrons had low wing model planes. Fighting Six [VF-6] had Grumman F3F's, which were biplanes, with retractable gear that had to be retracted manually. And the squadron that I was in, Scouting Six [VS-6], had Curtis SBC3's and they were biplanes. The fuselage and the upper wing was all metal, but the lower wing was fabric. And when I got in the squadron, I think the first month I had four hours and gradually I built up as I became more familiar with flight and with the airplane and the equipment. So we'd go out on gunnery runs, dive-bombing. We did dive-bombing quite a lot.

JP: Did you ever poke around the airplanes on your off time and look at them and become more familiar that way?

JL: Yes, because, you know, that was my cleaning station too. So we helped the mechanic keep it clean, checked out our radio equipment, made sure everything was, you know, in good order.

JP: Did you ever get to know any of the pilots at this time?

JL: Did I what?

JP: Did you ever get to know any of the pilots?

JL: I flew with several pilots, but after a while usually you flew with one more often than you did the other. I flew with several pilots the first year and the second year I flew mostly with a pilot by the name of J. N. West. And he was an excellent pilot. We got along well together in the air. I trusted him and he trusted me. And we had a pretty good record for dive-bombing and machine gunnery between the two of us.

JP: Now what was your responsibility? What did you do for the plane?

JL: My responsibility was to make contact reports by Morse code. In a wartime situation, if you use voice, and an enemy had an interpreter, you could give away your position or important information. And usually...

JP: So you went through training on the *Enterprise*.

JL: It's in there (chuckling). That's the reason I...

JP: Well...

JL: March 1940, you know.

JP: Mm-hm, so you made it to the squadron in early 1940.

JL: Yeah.

JP: You were responsible basically for communications on board the aircraft?

JL: Yes.

JP: Okay. There was a pilot and then there was you, essentially...

JL: Right.

JP: ...aboard ship. Where were you located on the aircraft?

JL: I sat in the rear cockpit.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: We had a radio receiver and a transmitter and a direction finder. And I had to become—and also I had a thirty-caliber machine gun. Well, I never used a gun in my life.

JP: You hadn't trained on a thirty-caliber?

JL: Mm-hm.

JP: You had trained?

JL: No.

JP: No.

JL: Not when I first got in.

JP: So you made the squadron team and you were put in charge of radio communications for this particular aircraft.

JL: Right.

JP: And aboard the aircraft, in your particular area of the plane, a thirty-millimeter machine gun, but you hadn't trained on a thirty-millimeter.

JL: That's right. So the ordnance men would take us in the ordnance shack and show us how to load a can of ammunition in the chamber and how to charge it and we went to several classes on using the scope, the sight, on how to lead an airplane, [*it*] had several rings on the inside. I can't remember, I think it was a twenty-knot and a thirty-knot ring. And various other indicators that various positions were in the circumference.

JP: Now who was responsible for navigating the aircraft?

JL: The pilot.

JP: And you're basically just exclusively for communications?

JL: Right. But in part of his navigation might be for me to give him a radio bearing on a radio station or a ship broadcasting a signal.

JP: Tell me about the radio on the aircraft. Was it a difficult piece of machinery to learn?

JL: They were complicated at that time because of what we called a TRF receiver. So...

JP: Was that a new type of radio?

JL: Yeah, they had to be aligned. I can't think of what the words TRF mean. Tune Radio Frequency. It had several coils and

they had to be adjusted to be able to receive, you know, the broadcast frequency. They had a range that they covered.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: So that you tuned all these coils so that you had a parabola, okay, a width of frequencies. And these coils were tuned such that the peak frequencies were the ones that that coil was designed to be used for. So we had, I think we had four different coils for that old RU-12 receiver. And if our frequency was assigned, one frequency was assigned today, then tomorrow, the captain of the ship or the skipper of the squadron could say we're changing our frequency to another one.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: So you'd have to go put in a new unit.

JP: Who would you communicate with?

JL: Our radio towers, control towers.

JP: That could be on the *Enterprise* or anywhere else?

JL: That's right.

JP: Okay. So now, let's continue. And you had made the squadron. Now you're basically training as a radio person.

JL: Right.

JP: And you're heading—when did you—tell me about going through Panama and then on through the Pacific. When did you do that with the *Enterprise*?

JL: We arrived in, let's see, in April 1939. "Because of the situation in Europe, we were ordered to the Pacific Fleet and we transited the canal in May 1939- April 1939". We arrived in San Diego in May and we were still part of ship's complement and those of us that were in training aboard ship for radiomen received our third class rating when we arrived in San Diego. And then shortly after that we were transferred to [a] squadron.

So from May 1939 until I was shot down, I was in Scouting Six [VS-6]. It was the only ship I was ever on.

JP: Okay. So you, through 1939, you had trained for the squadron in 1940. You had gotten on the squadron in early 1940. Is that correct?

JL: Nineteen thirty-nine, well, late 1939.

JP: Okay.

JL: Let's see. Wait a minute, [*couldn't have*] been six months. Okay, let's say '40, March '40. I know that's about right, yeah.

JP: Okay. Well let's move right up then to the events just immediately before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

JL: Okay.

JP: The *Enterprise* is located where at this particular point?

JL: After we arrived on the West Coast, we made numerous tours to Honolulu, to Hawaii. I believe that before December 1941, we had made two tours-three tours to Honolulu. And on the twenty-eighth of November—let's see. That autumn of 1941, there was quite a few PBY's that would land at Ford Island and they would have Dutch Air



Force markings on them. The situation in Europe was getting tighter. Hitler was taking everything. The situation in the Atlantic was worsening.

JP: Were you aware of this though...

JL: Yeah.

JP: ...at that time?

JL: Yes.

JP: On the *Enterprise*?

JL: Yes.

JP: Where was the *Enterprise* docked at this point, Honolulu Bay or at Pearl?

JL: At Ford Island. We docked at Ford Island but we'd go out on training missions, you know, for most of the time.

JP: Who was the commanding officer of the *Enterprise* at this time?

JL: Captain George [D.] Murray, before him was Captain [C.A.] Pownall. I can see the first skipper, but I can't remember his name right now. On the twenty-eighth of November, we went to sea to qualify Marine fighter squadron VMF-211 for carrier landings. And we were told that in the event of a crisis and the *Enterprise* lost all her fighters—which was her major protection—that they would have to call on the Marines to come out and replace those who were lost. But the Marines weren't required, at that time, weren't required to have carrier landings, you know, be approved for carrier landings. So this was fine with us. We knew what was happening. So on the afternoon of the twenty-eighth, they

made three landings and they were supposed to make five to qualify. At the end of the third landing, the captain told us to secure from flight quarters.

JP: Meaning?

JL: And that we were on a secret mission. He said that when we left Pearl Harbor, he had received an envelope from Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Fleet that he was not to open until a specified time. And it so happened...

JP: But of course the crew had no knowledge of this.

JL: We didn't have any knowledge of this.

JP: At that time, no. So you didn't have any knowledge of this secret mission.

JL: Right. So we had Admiral Halsey aboard. We were Task Force Eight. We had three cruisers and—no, a couple of destroyers with us, nine destroyers. So we were told the Marines would be taken to Wake and that...

JP: It's Wake Island?

JL: Yes. And that this was a secret mission and we weren't to ever discuss it with anyone, not even amongst ourselves.

JP: A secret mission? You still didn't know where you were going, did you?

JL: No. No, we didn't know where we were going—but yes we did. He told us where we were going. Said, "We're going take the Marines to Wake."

Well, the Marines were just as astounded as we were, because they had been told they were going out for carrier

landing practice and that they should take along shaving equipment and, you know...

JP: Was the *Enterprise* at this time, did it have its full complement of aircraft?

JL: Oh yes. We moved our aircraft, you know, the surplus, to the flight deck.

JP: Yeah.

JL: Or to hangar deck. So they were told that, you know, just to take enough toilet articles for an overnight stay because they'd surely qualify the next day, okay. But at the end of the third qualification landing, why, we secured from flight quarters. The captain told us that we were on a secret mission to Wake, not to talk about it and if it was ever divulged...

JP: How would this information...

JL: ...and we were found out, we would get a court martial.

JP: How would information like that get to the crew? How was that information disseminated?

JL: The captain told us that over the loudspeaker, public address system.

JP: Okay. Well, we're going to stop there for a minute, Jack. We're going to change the tapes.

JL: Okay.

JP: So we'll continue.

JL: Yeah, he's getting ready to go to work now.

(Conversation off-mike)

END OF TAPE #37

TAPE #38

JP: Okay, so now it's November 28, you've gotten orders...

JL: Right.

JP: ...you're taking off for Wake Island now and you've had some Marine pilots on ship.

JL: Right.

JP: So now you're heading off to Wake. It's roughly about a week or so before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

JL: Right.

JP: So you go off to sea. Tell me a little of what happened then, you're going out to Wake.

JL: On our way to Wake we were instructed to strip the Marines' planes down, take the radio gear out and check it, see if it was operating properly. Check the engine, mask it off so that they could be painted because an airplane that's polished glints in the sun and can be readily detected. So it was painted gray underneath and light blue on top so that it would blend with sea or sky, depending on the position of the observer. So...

JP: Did the—just to stop you there, Jack—did the Japanese do the same thing with their planes?

JL: No, they...

JP: \_\_\_\_\_ paint?

JL: They didn't have any camouflage on theirs. They had various colors, however. But I don't recall what they were. They were like an olive drab, some of their airplanes.

JP: Okay, sorry. Go ahead.

JL: During the trip to Wake [*Island*], we got the Marine planes up to A-1 condition and painted. And I guess it was the first or second of December 1941, a PBY from Wake came out to show the Marine fighters the way back [*to*] Wake [*Island*].

JP: Now what was the extent of your entourage at this time? Are you solo, the *Enterprise* travel solo at this time?

JL: Yeah, what's this now?

JP: Did the *Enterprise* travel alone or were you...

JL: No, no. We had...

JP: You were accompanied by...

JL: We had a task force.

JP: Right.

JL: Task Force Eight. Three cruisers and nine destroyers and an oil tanker was assigned to us for refueling. However she wasn't with us, I don't think, that day. Yes, she was too! Because she had to be with us to refuel the destroyers.

Anyhow, the PBY came out. So when the PBY appeared over the ship, on the horizon, we were at flight quarters, the

Marines were given orders to take off and I was in a group of twelve SBD's.

JP: Now when was this now? When did this take place?

JL: About the first of December.

JP: Okay, the first of December.

JL: Or second, second of December. So we escorted the fighters then until we could see Wake [*Island*] on the horizon. And our orders were, "When you see Wake just come above the horizon, turn around and come back to ship," because the Marines have their destination [*at*] hand.

So we returned to ship and everything was fine. And nothing happened. The weather was pretty rough. We didn't get too much flying time in on the way back to Pearl Harbor. One of the destroyers sprung one of the seams and had a slow leak. And we had to refuel destroyers, so we had to slow down. We were scheduled to arrive in Honolulu on the sixth of December.

JP: Okay, so you're now, you had gone to Wake Island. You had done your business there.

JL: Right.

JP: And now you're heading back.

JL: We're heading back.

JP: All right.

JL: We were scheduled to arrive in Pearl Harbor on my birthday (chuckles).

JP: That's right, December 6.

JL: On the sixth of December.

JP: That's right, that would've been your...

JL: Twenty-second.

JP: ...twenty-second birthday.

JL: So anyhow we slowed down. And then the word was passed that we wouldn't arrive until the seventh. So on the morning of the seventh, at four o'clock in the morning, it was reveille for the flight crews and get ready for launch. The flight plan of the day had already been made out and we knew that there would be eighteen planes taking off.

JP: This is on the morning of the seventh now?

JL: On the morning of the seventh.

JP: Now what's the time? What is the time difference now between where the *Enterprise* is and Pearl Harbor? Is there is a time change?

JL: No, there was no time change.

JP: There is no time change.

JL: We had already, you know, made up for that. We were within Honolulu Time Zone, same time.

JP: So what, how many miles were you now from...

JL: We were at 215 miles west at launch.

JP: And you're at the time zone now?

JL: And we were launched at six o'clock.

JP: In the morning?

JL: In the morning.

JP: Okay.

JL: At 6:25, according to the squadron commanders' pilot report, we rendezvoused [*at*] point option...

JP: Well, why eighteen planes? Why did they—was that common practice to launch...

JL: The common practice is to search a sector of ninety degrees ahead of the ship, forty-five degrees either side of center.

JP: So that's a common practice, as you're approaching...

JL: Right. It just cleared the route for the ship, to make sure there's no threats out there.

JP: Does that happen every morning?

JL: Everyday at sea.

JP: Everyday.

JL: And every afternoon.

JP: So this was part of a very, of a scheduled training or...

JL: This is routine.

JP: ...routine.



JL: Routine.

JP: Okay.

JL: Okay, morning and afternoon search.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: An inner and outer air patrol.

JP: Right.

JL: There's airplanes flying around the carrier all the time.

JP: Okay.

JL: Okay. So our orders were to search to a distance of 150 miles and land at Ford Island. The heading of the ship...

JP: So you were not to come back to the *Enterprise* at this point?

JL: No.

JP: You're flying 150 miles straight ahead...

JL: And then turn for Pearl Harbor, Ford Island.

JP: Got you. All right.

JL: Okay. The planes in the northern of the air group commander and the...

JP: Do you remember his name?

JL: Mm?

JP: Do you remember his name?

JL: Young. Yes, Commander Young, Lieutenant Commander [Howard L.] Young, [Air Group Commander, USS *Enterprise*]. He had the most direct route into Pearl Harbor and our commanding officer, Lieutenant Commander [Hallsted L.] Hopping [Commanding Officer, VS-6], he, they just about split it. But theirs was the shortest route. It was direct, straight from Point Option, or from the *Enterprise*, right into Ford Island. The rest of us—let's see, there was eighteen. There's sixteen of us left, eight south of those and eight north.

JP: Now, who was the pilot of your aircraft at this time?

JL: The pilot of my aircraft was [LT(jg.) Hart Dale Hilton], he prefers to be called Dale, Dale Hilton.

JP: Okay.

JL: Okay.

JP: But for the record though, what's his full name?

JL: Hart, H. D. Hilton, he always signed his name. He was Lieutenant (jg.) [Hart Dale Hilton].

JP: Okay.

JL: Anyhow, the most northern sector was flown by [Ensign] Manuel Gonzalez and his route would take him north of Kauai and east for about ten miles, okay. Let's see. Ensign [Carlton .T.] Fogg had the southernmost sector and next to him was [Lieutenant (jg.) Hart Dale] Hilton and I.

JP: Did you guys fly in tandem? Did you fly double?

JL: We had two planes to each sector. If it was ten degrees wide, we'd be flying right down the median of that ten degrees. We'd split it, one plane on each side.

JP: Okay.

JL: Okay.

JP: Now, what was your trajectory at this point? Where were you?

JL: We were south of Oahu and also Molokai. I think if we had flown, if we had kept flying beyond 150 miles, we would've flown past the southern portion of Hawaii.

JP: Okay.

JL: So...

JP: Now you're approaching.

JL: We're approaching, right. So our 150-mile limit was quite a distance from Barbers' Point, which was our marker. But when we were about—not long after we made the turn, we had completed our 150-mile distance and turned for Barbers' Point, we heard, "Don't shoot. This is an American plane."

JP: Wait a minute, I'm sorry, "Don't shoot?"

JL: "Don't shoot."

JP: "This is an American plane?"

JL: "This is an American plane."

JP: Where was that coming from? What...

JL: It was—we didn't know.

JP: That just came over the radio?

JL: It just come over the radio but we knew it was one of our planes...

JP: And you had heard this.

JL: ...because it was on our frequency.

JP: But you didn't know which plane.

JL: We didn't know which plane. And then a few seconds later heard, "Get out the rubber boat. We're going in!"

And that was the only transmission of the morning but it, our wingman, [*Ensign Carlton T.*] Fogg, come in and wanted to know if we heard it. And so in those days, we had radio silence. That was another thing.

JP: So it wasn't a common practice then to communicate with the land as you're flying to...

JL: No, on this particular [*hop*], when we left Ford Island for Wake [*Island*], we were sworn to radio silence, "Don't you use those transmitters for anything."

JP: Even as you were approaching Oahu?

JL: That's right. The situation was pretty [*critical*] then, you know. So my reaction was, "That crazy son of a bitch broke radio silence. Who is it?"

And no one knew. So the wingman came in, and we had a practice of beating on our heads, [a closed] fist was a dot; an open fist was the dash. So if I wanted to...

JP: Is that Morse code?

JL: Morse code. So if I wanted, if you asked me a question...

JP: Yeah.

JL: ...why you'd do it this way, okay. Like walk would be dit, [*dit*]-dah-dah, [*dit*]-dah, dit-dit-dit, dit-dah, dah, you know. So, you know, we were proficient with the Morse code and after you did this a few times, it was easy.

JP: Now were you, are you armed? Is your aircraft armed?

JL: We were armed, right. Before we had left for Wake, we were told that if we saw anything out there to shoot first and ask questions next.

JP: Was it common to have your aircraft armed going on these...

JL: No, this was very uncommon. We were also told to take our communication book out of the radio locker because we had procedure using various letters that meant different kinds of actions, to take different kinds of actions. So we were told, you know, to take that out of our locker and bring it into communication.

JP: Okay, so now you're...

JL: And take our tool, anything we want. And then we were given as much ammunition as we wanted to take. So I think had about six cans that I could put along the SCAR-FUR-RING, underneath the machine gun.

JP: Now at this time, had you practiced or trained on that thirty-millimeter?

JL: I was an expert. (Chuckles)

JP: Uh-huh, okay.

JL: Okay. So I filled the radio locker with thirty can—three cans of thirty caliber and a tool locker with thirty caliber.

JP: Now the thirty caliber, is that a water-cooled or an air-cooled?

JL: It's air-cooled.

JP: Air-cooled. Okay. So now you're approaching and heard this over the radio and something had happened. And you're approaching Oahu, let's go from there.

*[The ring was named after a man. I guess of German decent. I do not have the necessary books to research it. That is pertaining to machine guns and Scharff (spelling ?) Ring. It was the semicircular ring in the rear cockpit upon which the .30 caliber machine gun was mounted.]*

JL: Well then we were getting pretty cautious. It wasn't long before we had, we could smell the smoke of, well, you know, cordite or ammunition that had been exploded.

JP: This is—did you see?

JL: Yeah. No, it was, it come out because the winds are prevailing easterlies, okay. So it was a slight unusual smell and it just gradually occurred, you know. And the nearer we came to Barbers' Point, the more strong it became.

JP: But you couldn't identify the smell?

JL: No, we knew it was ammunition.

JP: Okay.

JL: And then as we got closer, we could see the smoke from the *Arizona* because when we turned at the end of our scouting mission for Barbers Point, we were quite close to the island.

JP: Well, how high would you typically...

JL: And as we came close—we were 2,000 feet.

JP: So you're very low.

JL: So...

JP: Had anyone fired on you at this time?

JL: No one had fired on us. Okay. So when, as we neared Barbers Point, then it come up over the horizon and we could, even before that, we could see the smoke because our arrival at Barbers Point was between 8:30 and 8:45. And this was the conclusion, 8:30 the Japanese finished the first attack, just about. So we kept coming in and the nearer we became the more obvious it was that, you know.

JP: And still no radio contact?

JL: No radio.

JP: Other than that one...

JL: No radio, no one. No one used the radio.

JP: And you didn't break contact?

JL: No, until we got to Barbers Point. We arrived at Barbers Point and there was three planes circling. So [Ensign Carlton T.] Fogg and us joined up with the executive officer [(VS-6) who was Lieutenant [Wilmer F.] Gallaher.

JP: Now have you landed at this time?

JL: What?

JP: You hadn't landed the aircraft at this time?

JL: Not yet, no.

JP: No.

JL: Not yet. So we'd joined up on them and shortly after that, two more planes come in. So there was seven of us circling over Barbers Point during the second attack. And we could watch 'em dive-bombing. But we were in SBD's and for some reason, Lieutenant Gallaher didn't want to go in. His orders were to go in and land at Ford Island and we couldn't do that. In the meantime, he had broken radio silence and said that Pearl Harbor was under attack. And as I look back on the situation, he didn't go in because we just were no competition for fighters. So he decided he was going to save us.

JP: Now had you spied any fighters, any Japanese Zeroes at this time?

JL: Oh, we saw them, yeah.

JP: Okay.

JL: But I didn't see any Zeroes at the time.

JP: Mm-hm.



JL: So anyhow, we circled around there until Gallaher determined that the attack was over. So we went in and he tried to land at Ford Island, he couldn't, so he come back and tried to land at Ewa [*Marine Corps Air Station*]. And he got on the ground at Ewa and a Marine sergeant popped up on a wing and told him to get back up in the air, before he got strafed.

JP: Were you low on fuel at this time?

JL: We were getting low, yeah. We had sufficient fuel to mess around, you know. We had about another hour.

JP: Would it have been conceivable to fly back to the *Enterprise* at this time?

JL: No. No. Not after we had been circling a while. No. So we tried to, he tried to get into Ford Island; he couldn't, landed at Ewa. And he took off again, we followed him around and we couldn't get into Ford. He tried to land at Ford Island after we landed at Ewa. There was three—the first three planes of which he was the section, his section, landed at Ford Island, but four of us couldn't make it. They were firing at us, you know, friendly fire. They were firing AA, 1.1's, thirty calibers, anything.

JP: So at this point, you had been fired upon?

JL: Yeah, we were under friendly fire.

JP: Okay. Did you—at this time you broke radio contact?

JL: Oh yeah, we had broken radio contact.

JP: Who were you talking to?

JL: There wasn't anyone to talk to.

JP: No one?

JL: The tower at Ford Island had been evacuated.

JP: So you were trying desperately to contact someone down below.

JL: Yes and we couldn't contact anyone. So one destroyer going out the channel starting firing at us. Hilton dove for the ground.

JP: Was that the *Nevada*?

JL: No. We watched it, you know. It was a destroyer because there was a challenge and a recognition signal, light signals. In the cockpit I had an aldis lamp that gave off a real bright light that was discernable in the daytime. And if I approached the ship, that ship would challenge me and I better have the right Morse code letter response for that hour.

JP: I see.

JL: Or we'd be fired upon.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: Or I could challenge a ship, either way. And that challenge and response changed every hour. So before we went out on a hop, we knew what the challenge and the response was for the hours that we would be out.

JP: So you knew at this...

JL: Yes. And...

JP: So you made contact with the...

JL: And the challenge and the response for the hour that we were in the air was "P" and "M." (Laughs) And so I was flashing "P" and "M" at that destroyer as fast as I could. I wasn't going to fire on him because I knew what I was firing at, but he didn't know, you know. But I think it became obvious as soon as I know that I saw, you know, tracer flying by over our starboard wing or port wing rather, as we went into starboard turn. And it went high over the wing. And as soon as we got around to where the insignia on our wing showed, he quit.

JP: But he didn't recognize the signal?

JL: But before that he didn't recognize the signal or he didn't see it because it had to go to the signal bridge, then down to the captain, okay, before...

JP: Did you ever ask anyone about that...

JL: ...that time...

JP: ...after the event?

JL: No. We didn't know what ship it was, you know.

JP: Okay. All right.

JL: But anyhow, for the signal bridge to get that response, you know, it would take thirty seconds to get to the skipper before he'd say cease fire.

JP: Right.

JL: By that time, we'd be dead. So anyhow, we landed at Ewa and Hilton wanted to get orders and he told me to camouflage the airplane and put bushes and stuff over the insignia on the wing so it wouldn't be evident. While he was in there, a gas truck come by to refuel us, so I filled the tanks. We had a 500-pound bomb put on and we were ordered to join some B-17s out of Hickam to go look for the Japanese fleet.

So we took off from Ewa, three of us.

JP: That's quite an order, "Go look for the Japanese fleet. Where are they?" Did you have any idea?

JL: Well...

JP: Did you have any inclination where they were at this time?

JL: During the end of the second attack, Gallaher saw a bunch of 'em leaving off of Kaena Point, so...

JP: Which is north.

JL: Which is northwest of Barbers Point.

JP: Northwest.

JL: Okay. So he relayed that information.

JP: So that's all the intelligence information that you had at that time, as far as the direction of the Japanese fleet. You made a hunch, it was a hunch?

JL: No, after we had landed at Ewa, we didn't have any information at all.

JP: Okay.

JL: We were to join the B-17's. They were the ones that had this, supposedly had the information. But they had already taken off. And we were flying around over...

JP: Now, where were the B-17's? Were they...

JL: They had gone. They had left. We circled around over Aiea for about ten minutes and we were fired upon again.

JP: By...?

JL: By friendly forces, okay. So we landed at Ford Island. In the meantime, our skipper, Hopping, had received orders from COMBATFOR [*Commander Battle Force*] I think it was, to look for the Japanese fleet off of Barbers Point, for a distance of 100 miles, because he had a report that there was enemy forces out there.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: So Hopping went out sixty miles then he started a square search. You go sixty miles, then a hundred miles, then a hundred miles this way, you know, expand it 'til he went around—I forget what it was now. That's in the book, because I got it off his pilot report.

But anyhow, he had instituted a square search and he didn't see anything out there.

JP: Mm-hm.

JL: So he, as he was on his way back, he even made a transmission into Ford Island—I forget who—and Hilton picked it up and told him of the instructions we received. So Hopping told Hilton and the other two planes to go back to Ford Island and rearm and refuel. So we went back there

and we landed—let's see, it was, I guess eleven, shortly after eleven. Or was it twelve, I'm not sure. We landed back there, rearmed, refueled and there was nine of us. Out of the eighteen planes that had left that morning, there was only nine available for a scouting hop.

JP: I think there, Jack, I'm going to stop you. Not that I want to.

JL: Okay.

JP: Because we are running out of time and of course the story beyond this is very important too. But first, I'm going to give you back—you had referred to a book. And I want you to explain the book as perhaps a potential resource material. And you can put that up to the camera. I want to get a picture of that book. Now, what is that book?

JL: This book is my naval career up until the time I was released from a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. I started with the *Enterprise* and the various cruises that we had made, the various divisions that I had served in while I was aboard the *Enterprise*, and our flight into Pearl Harbor on the morning of the seventh, our attack on the Marianas and Gilbert Islands on the first of February 1942. Our attack on Wake Island, February 26 and our attack on Marcus Island, March 4, 1942, where Lieutenant (jg.), [Hart] Dale Hilton and I were hit by A.A. fire and set afire and had to ditch. And we were picked up by the Japanese and taken to a prison camp in Japan. Our first stop in Japan was to be questioned by the Japanese in Yokohama. We spent about a week there, undergoing questioning and a little bit of a beating. From there, we went to Ofuna and while we were at Ofuna, the Japanese officer was talking with Dale and Dale asked if we could go to Zentsuji. So that was the first big prison camp that we were in. In May of 1942, I was taken out of Zentsuji into Osaka and we were quartered under the stadium in Osaka and worked stevedoring, unloading ships, at steel

mills, lumberyards. And from there, we were transferred to another camp on the waterfront, which was bombed out in June 1945. We were hit by - Osaka was hit by 800 B-29's and B-17's. Our camp was burnt down and we were sent to a camp in Toyama, Japan, which is on the west coast of Japan.

On August 15, I was on a working party, taken out to unload a ship. We were put, when we arrived at the docks, we were put in the hold of the ship and instructed to go to the bottom. And they covered the hatch over. After we had been there for quite a while, one of the guys, we heard some voices and one of the guys climbed up the ladder and pushed open the hatch cover and said all the Japanese were bowing at speakers, that from which a voice came. And he listened for a while; we could understand Japanese quite well by that time. And he said the Japanese were going to surrender. And so not long after this, the radio stopped, they uncovered the hatch and told us to go back to topside and marched us back to camp. On the way back, we asked the guards if they had, if Japan had surrendered and they wouldn't answer us.

During most of my time as a prisoner of war, I was with the fellows that had surrendered at Guam and we stayed together most of the time. We had a chief in charge by the name of Saunders. When we arrived back in camp, he asked the Japanese commander if Japan had surrendered and the Japanese commander said yes. So Saunders said, "Okay, well I'm taking over the camp. You are now my prisoner. Take your Japanese guards off the gate and give us your rifles."

JP: Well, I think at that we're going to have to stop, Jack, because we're running out of tape.

JL: Okay.

JP: So thank you very much for your time.

JL: Okay. Thank you.

JP: Alrighty.

END OF INTERVIEW